3:Nash E-5 (1964-1965) 1967
[p.455-A)

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Teklum

Death as a Way of Life: The Increasing Resort to Homicide in a Maya Indian Community[1]

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The breaking-down of a social-control system based on belief in the guardianship of the spiritual ancestors and their temporal agents, the curers, is reflected in a rising homicide rate as people turn to individual sanctions when threatened. The acts of homicide differ in their social significance according to who is killed, the context, the agency, and the motivation of the killer. Thirty-seven homicides between 1938 and 1965, analyzed in terms of these component variables, reflect the conflicts arising from competition in new economic enterprises, the rising suspicion of curers' abuse of their supernatural power, and the loss of belief in the guardianship of the ancestors.

THE social impact of homicide has caused some analysts[2] to treat it and its supposed inverted complement, suicide, as one kind of behavior with a single meaning, ignoring Durkheim's caveat that behavioral rubrics categorize diverse phenomena. Here I shall analyze the variety of strategies involved in killing in a Mexican community, which I shall call Teklum (the Tzeltal term for village), and endeavor to show how rules of behavior are expressed in killing and in attempts to avoid being killed. Further, I shall endeavor to point out what these indicate about structural and organizational changes both within the community and in its relations with the wider society. Since suicide is absent, except for a single case of a madman, I have restricted my enquiry to homicide.

Teklum is a predominantly Indian township of Mexico. The population of the town center about 1,900—includes only one Ladino, or non-Indian, family, that of the schoolteacher. The sense of community is limited to people living in the center and in the four nearby hamlets (*barrios*).

The town center is divided physically and socially into two endogamous sections, called "upper" and "lower." The outlying hamlets are linked to the nearest section by social and economic ties. The civil and religious posts of the town are, in local theory, apportioned evenly between the sections. This was in fact true until the 1950's; for each of the ranked posts had a paired complement, so that both sides of the dual division were represented, and the single posts of president and *sindico* (the president's administrative assistant) were al-

4: Villa Rojas E-4,5 (1938-1944) 1969 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

9. The Tzeltal

ALFONSO VILLA ROJAS

133 flows through the eastern part of the region, the latter through the western, both draining large basins.

161 According to the census of 1950, the pop-
162 ulation of the zone totals 76,617 individuals, distributed over 15,970 sq. km. Of these 49,053 persons are Indian, 27,564 are Ladino. This population is distributed according to Table 1.

[128] San Cristobal de las Casas is omitted from the table because its population is predominantly Ladino (19,758 individuals) and because the Indians who live there (3,296) are of the Tzotzil tongue. Socoltenango and Nicolas Ruiz are also omitted because they no longer have an Indian-speaking population.

161 The central region has the municipalities
631 of the highest density of population: Oxchuc with 129 inhabitants per sq. km.; and Tene-
[134] japa with 115. The northern part has an area seven times as large with only twice as much population, the municipality of Ocosingo has hardly one inhabitant per sq. km. in spite of the fact that its lands are the most fertile of the entire region. Although it

[P. 195-B]
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4: Villa Rojas E-4,5 (1938-1944) 1969 NV9 Tzeltal NV9

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TABLE 1—DISTRIBUTION OF THE POPULATION BY MUNICIPALITIES
(Census of 1950)

Municipalities	Area in sq. km	Tzeltal-speakers	Spanish-speakers	Total Population
North Zone:				
Sitala	550	5,435	1,385	6,821
Yajalon	145	6,026	4,010	10,036
Chilon	462	9,049	2,070	11,118
Ocosingo	12,143	9,170	3,770	12,940
Subtotal	13,300	29,680	11,235	40,915
Central Zone:				
Chanal	192	2,328	553	2,881
Oxchuc	42	4,074	1,338	5,412
Tenejapa	67	6,215	1,535	7,750
Altamirano	1,559	2,945	1,810	4,655
Subtotal	1,860	15,462	5,236	20,698
South Zone:				
Teopisca	270	754	4,601	5,355
Amatenango	355	1,773	756	2,529
Pinola	185	1,384	5,736	7,120
Subtotal	810	3,911	11,093	15,004
GRAND TOTAL	15,970	49,053	27,564	76,617

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TABLE 2—SPEAKERS OF TZELTAL
(Distribution by Zones)

Zones	Monolingual	Bilingual	Total
North Zone	23,429	8,251	31,680
Central Zone	11,291	4,171	15,462
South Zone	323	3,588	3,911
TOTAL	35,043	16,010	51,053

[P. 196-A]

Although it
161 has an average of 19 inhabitants per sq. km.,
[241] the southern zone has lands that are suitable
[63] for agriculture and for irrigation, such as in
[128] Amatenango. Later I shall discuss the influence of these factors on the uneven economic and social development of the three zones.

161 The figures on Indians are based exclu-
162 sively on use of the Indian language and
197 so include both monolinguals and bilin-
191 guals. To differentiate each group, however, I have made corrections based on field work as shown in Table 2.

141 The average height of these Indians ranges from 1.55 to 1.60 m. Referring to

[P. 196-B]

ious meats, and canned foods such as salmon, sardines, and sausages.

The keeping of bees is not widespread. The Indians instead take advantage of the wild honey, which is commonly gathered during certain parts of the year. Tenango was the only town where I observed beehives next to the huts. The bees, large and yellow, are called *aja-chab* and are brought from the woods. When a tree is found with one of these beehives, the section containing the hive is cut off and is taken to town; the ends of this section are covered with jicaras, which are stuck on with clay.

Settlement Patterns

Town and Parajes

All the communities consist of a town center and a number of settlements, called parajes, which are scattered over the municipio. The town is the political, religious, and commercial center of the entire community; there the municipal authorities have their offices, and the church and shops are located. In general, the Ladinos reside in the center, their houses arranged in aligned streets, but some communities (Chanal, Amatenango, Aguacatenango, Cancuc, Bachajon) refuse to accept Ladinos in the town permanently. The Indians prefer the parajes, where the huts are dispersed irregularly.

As observed by Sol Tax for the highlands of Guatemala (1937), the proportion of Indians who reside in the town center varies. In some communities (Chanal, Aguacatenango, Cancuc, Tenango) nearly all the people live in the capital. In Chanal, with a population of 2,881 persons, 2,386 reside in the center and so it is a "nucleated town," according to Tax's terminology. In contrast, the most common community is the "vacant town." Tenejapa, for example, has only 517 inhabitants of a total 7,750 residing in the center. The least frequent is an intermediate type, where some live in the center and some in the parajes, as typified by

[P. 203-B]

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162 Amatenango del Valle, a community of 2,529 inhabitants, of which 1,470 reside in the town center.

621 The town centers are divided into two sections, called barrios by Ladinos and calpules by Indians (Oxchuc and Cancuc). The imaginary line which separates one barrio from another passes through the center of the town, sometimes east-west, sometimes north-south, with no fixed orientation.

[776] Each barrio has its own local authorities and sometimes its own patron saint (Oxchuc and Bachajon). The principal function of the barrios was not only political or religious but also social, in regulating mar-

[178] riage. Endogamy was common to all barrios, but today that rule is losing its rigidity. In Aguacatenango, B. Metzger (1960, p. 8) tells us that, "The rule of barrio endogamy, which is viable in 86% of the known marriages, contributes to the localization of related families limiting the geographical range of marriage choice." A similar situation obtains in Amatenango (J. Nash, 1959, p. 3), Cancuc (Guiteras Holmes, 1947, p. 7), and Bachajon (Guiteras Holmes, 1961c, p. 167).

[178] In Bachajon, Guiteras Holmes states that:

[578] "In the old days there was no marriage between the *barrios*. If a boy from San Sebastian took a walk through San Geronimo, he was beaten; they would give him a '*maciza*,' as they say. If a boy from a *barrio* approached the waterholes to court a girl, he fared very badly." The calpules of Oxchuc, although they have politico-religious significance, have no influence at all in the selection of wives.

621 The parajes have a few scattered huts
778 among the cultivated fields. Each paraje is
[361] bound by religious ties to a given cave where a cross, the supreme sacred symbol, is kept. The name of the paraje is generally
778 taken from the name of the cave. Sacred
821 caves of secondary importance also exist.
823 This mystical regard for caves is based in the belief that they are the place from which issues the lightning to punish the

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

tions of self will find a responsive audience only within these linguistic and physical boundaries. The sense of insulation is a denial of regional and national political institutions in which they interact with the other Indians and Ladinos who are part of their present world and share their history. The town itself is a product of the Spanish colonial *congregación*, which drew together diverse Indian populations that had been scattered in small settlements. The outlying barrios are occupied by Indians who have moved out from the center, as well as foreign Indians who had worked in the *fincas*, or large plantations, within the township. These latter people are referred to by a derisive term, *Kurik*, meaning roughly "country hick." Beyond these, and still within the municipal limits, there are a series of *colonias*, settlements populated by Indians who have moved here from other towns and by *mestizos*, or acculturated Indians. These settlers acquired land in the time of Juarez or later in the Cardenas period. Ladino men are called *Kašlan* and women *Šinlan*; foreigners who do not appear to be of the country are called *Alemán*, the Spanish term for German.

The focus of this book is on the lives and thoughts of people living within the center. The people of Tzoʾontahal live in a square world, surrounded by a round universe. From the square hole, cut in the earth at the center post of their square house to receive the sacrifice of a live chicken when the house is built, stretches a square village (it appears as a rectangle on the map, but they draw it as a square).[2] The fields are measured in squares of twenty-five arms' breadths, with five handspans measuring the square between each plant. Within this square world, they have elaborated techniques for dealing with spiritual and human co-residents in curing rituals, offerings for crops, burial practices, and baptism rites. Their present cultural stock reveals a selective absorption of Spanish colonial features along with twentieth-century innovations. They have techniques for planting and harvesting milpa, marketing the pottery manufactured in all the households, curing an eclipse of the moon, divining causes of illness and curing the maladjusted social relations which cause it, manufacturing and

2. This view of the world as square is shared by Tzeltal and Tzotzil neighbors in Larraínzar (Holland 1963:69), San Pedro Chenalhó (Guiteras Holmes 1961:254), and Pinola (Hermitte 1964). The four-direction concept of the village and world noted by Landa (Tozzer 1941:135) suggests a square-space concept.

000 tóbal. The altitude above sea level varies from 2,000 meters in the hilly per-
133 iphery to 1,720 meters in the valley where the town center is located. Ejido
423 lands acquired in the 1930s have extended the boundaries of the township
632 to lower lands at 1,500 meters altitude.
133

Pre-Conquest settlement patterns in the Chiapas highlands were characterized by independent communities occupying the headlands around flat-bottomed valleys (R. M. Adams 1961:341). The choice of sites seems to have been based on defense against invading Toltec or other conquest groups (Calnek 1962:25). The sites investigated by Adams and Culbert (R. M. Adams 1961:347) in Amatenango belong to the late-Classic and early post-Classic period. They were marginal to the centers of Maya civilization in the Yucatán peninsula and Guatemala. Test excavations in the modern town indicate that it was occupied only after colonial times.

The town of Amatenango del Valle is first mentioned in the year 1528 when it was included in tribute lists with both the Nahuatl name, Amatenango, and the Tzeltal name, Tzobontaghal (Calnek n.d.). The tribute lists of 1761 include 33 families in the *parcialidad*, or Spanish political unit based on an indigenous settlement, of Zacatepec in Amatenango and 75 families in the parcialidad of Amatenango (Trens 1957 I:217). The first census done in 1778 shows a total population of 576, with 374 men and 202 women. The racial breakdown is listed as 8 white, 2 negro and mestizo, and 560 Indians (Trens 1957:221). By 1824, the population had increased to 1,620. The present population of 3,179 represents natural growth as well as inclusion of additional outlying settlements added in the latter part of the nineteenth century and during the 1930s with the enactment of the land reform act. The population changes indicate steady but not great increases. The capacity of the town to incorporate additional population has probably passed its peak. The present trend is for out-migration to newly opened ejido lands.

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The subdivisions of the town, which provide the framework for administration by the national government, are included in Table 1.

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The center. The center of Tzo'ontahal is called the "center [or navel] of the world." The residents of the center, with the exception of the schoolteacher's family, are all Indian. Although the town center forms

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7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

TABLE 1. Population of Political Subdivisions of the Township of Amatenango del Valle

Name of subdivision	*Men*	*Women*	*Total*
Center			
Tzoʔontahal	938	894	1,832
Colonias			
Bočibal	109	113	222
Teʔtikil	81	91	172
Pathuitz	36	30	66
San Caralampio	50	46	96
San Vicente	46	48	94
Ranchos and rancherias			
Buena Vista	1	5	6
Candelaria	5	3	8
Carmen	8	9	17
Carmen las Delicias	6	7	13
Cruz Quemada	5	10	15
El Porvenir	12	13	25
El Rabinal	11	9	20
El Rosario	12	17	29
La Esperanza	3	6	9
La Libertad	3	4	7
La Merced Buena Vista	4	5	9
Llano Grande	11	16	27
Porvenir	2	6	8
Rosario Tulanca	3	2	5
San Agustín	11	9	20
San Antonio Buena Vista (a)	63	76	139
San Antonio Buena Vista (b)	12	7	19
San Caralampio	8	9	17
San José Cruz Quemada	14	14	28
San José La Reforma	10	10	20
San José Yujulum	10	8	18
San Pedro Soledad	12	10	22
San Ramon Buena Vista	4	5	9
San Salvador	12	11	23
San Sebastian	1	1	2
Santa Anita	6	3	9
Santiago Buena Vista	11	10	21
Tulanca	5	6	11
Fincas			
San Nicolás	26	28	54
Tejonera	8	5	13
Total	1,559	1,546	3,105

SOURCE: 1960 census.

71 Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970

NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

591
593 parents. This role is institutionalized and the youngest child is referred to
[192] as *k'ol*, the last one.

591 The choice of residence after marriage is influenced by the following
593 factors:
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1. The couple live with whatever family has less pressure from immature siblings remaining in the household. If there is no other child in one family, there is a strong likelihood that the new family will remain in that household.

591 2. If there is any wealth difference, the couple tends to live with the
182 richer family. "Wealthy" families prefer to have their children live
434 near them and will make an effort to build a house within their compound or nearby.

Table 15. Trends in Household Composition, 1958–1964

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	Alannantik		*Ahk'olnantik*		*Total*	
Family type	*No. of families*	*Percent of total families*	*No. of families*	*Percent of total families*	*No. of families*	*Percent of total families*
Remained the same						
Nuclear	49	76	38	57	87	67
Virilocal	7	11	11	16	18	14
Uxorilocal	4	6	7	11	11	9
Joint sib	1	2	1	2	2	1
Grandparent-grandchild	1	2	2	3	3	2
Incomplete	2	3	7	11	9	7
Total	64	100	66	100	130	100
Percent of all families		44		34		39
New families created						
Nuclear	16	89	48	88	64	88
Uxorilocal	1	5.5	1	2	2	3
Incomplete	1	5.5	6	10	7	9
Total	18	100	55	100	73	100
Percent of all families		12		28		21
Families which changed *	64	44	74	38	138	40
Total number of families	146	100	195	100	341	100

* Direction of change indicated in Table 16.

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

Changes in the household composition in the period from 1958 to 1964 between the two censuses I made in the field indicate some of the trends toward nuclear family units or bilaterally-rather than predominantly patrilineally-extended units (Tables 15 and 16). Comparisons are made between the same household in each period. Comparison of family forms in the six-year period indicates a high rate of change, with 39 percent remaining the same and 40 percent changing. The remaining 21 percent are the newly created families. The direction of change favors nuclear families (40 cases or 29 percent of changes) and virilocal forms (27 cases or 20 percent of changes). Nuclear families were the most stable, with 62 remaining the same and 62 changing to another form. This contrasts with uxorilocal households which are the least stable, with 11 cases remaining the same and 23 changing, and virilocal households which follow a similar pattern with 14 cases remaining the same and 25 changing. Nuclear families account for 88 percent of the new families created by marriage in the period studied. The trend is toward a greater proportion of nuclear families, as measured by the various indices.

TABLE 16. Direction of Change in Household Composition, 1958–1964

	Alannantik		*Ahk'olnantik*		*Total*	
Family type	*No. of families*	*Percent of total families*	*No. of families*	*Percent of total families*	*No. of families*	*Percent of total families*
Change to nuclear from						
Virilocal	14	22	4	5	18	13
Uxorilocal	5	8	9	12	14	10
Joint sib			1	1	1	1
Grandparent-Grandchild			1	1	1	1
Incomplete	1	2	3	4	4	3
Unknown			2	3	2	1
Total	20	32	20	26	40	29
Change to virilocal from						
Nuclear	8	12	10	14	18	13
Uxorilocal	2	3	1	1	3	2
Joint sib			1	1	1	1
Incomplete	1	2	4	5	5	4
Total	11	17	16	21	27	20

(*cont.*)

[P.106]

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Family type	Alannantik No. of families	Alannantik Percent of total families	Ahk'olnantik No. of families	Ahk'olnantik Percent of total families	Total No. of families	Total Percent of total families
Change to uxorilocal from						
Nuclear	4	6	4	5	8	6
Virilocal	1	2	1	1.5	2	1
Joint sib			1	1.5	1	.7
Grandparent-grandchild			1	1.5	1	.7
Incomplete			1	1.5	1	.7
Unknown			1	1.5	1	.7
Total	5	8	9	12.5	14	10
Change to joint sib from						
Nuclear	1	2			1	.7
Virilocal			1	1.5	1	.7
Uxorilocal			1	1.5	1	.7
Total	1	2	2	3	3	2
Change to grandparent-grandchild from						
Nuclear			1	1.5	1	.7
Total			1	1.5	1	1
Change to incomplete from						
Nuclear	8	12	4	5	12	9
Virilocal	1	2	1	1.5	2	1.4
Uxorilocal	2	3	1	1.5	3	2
Joint sib	1	2			1	1
Unknown			2	3	2	1.4
Total	12	19	8	11	20	15
Change to disintegrated from						
Nuclear	11	17	10	14	21	15
Virilocal	2	3			2	1.4
Uxorilocal			2	3	2	1.4
Grandparent-grandchild			2	3	2	1.4
Incomplete	1	2	4	5	5	4
Total	14	22	18	25	32	23
Change to avunculocal from						
Nuclear	1	2			1	1
Total	64	100	74	100	138	100

7: Nash E-5 (1957-1967) 1970 NV9 Tzeltal NV9
Amatenango del Valle

The household into which an individual is born remains a resource base throughout his life. In nine cases noted in Table 17 in which separations occurred, the spouse returned to his or her natal home. In most cases involving the death of a spouse, the widow or widower stays in the household established during the marriage. If the children are too young to be economically useful, the surviving parent may return to the parental household with his or her children, or they may move in with married siblings. If the family was living with the parents of one of the spouses, the surviving members usually remain there even if the elder couple are not the parents of the widow or widower. A young widow living alone is the prey of drunken men during fiestas and requires a protector.

The stability of marriage can be seen in the statistics on changes in conjugal status in the period from the first census in 1958 to the second census in 1964 (Table 18). Of 264 marriages formed at the time of the first census, only 15, or 5 percent, were voluntarily dissolved; 16 percent were broken by the death of one or both spouses, and another 1 percent by the death of both partners. 10 widowers and 4 widows remarried, an index both to the greater availability of women for remarriage as well as to the necessity for a man to have a woman in the house.

TABLE 18. Changes in Conjugal Status, 1958–1964

Conjugal status	*Alannantik*	*Ahk'olnantik*	*Total*
Same	92	89	181
Separated	3	11	14
First marriage	28	65	93
Widowed	13	26	39
Two wives		1	1
Remarried			
Widower	6	4	10
Widow	2	2	4
Both died	3	1	4
Returned to wife	3	1	4
Unknown	3	21	24
Total	153	221	374